**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**A River Flows from Eden:**

**The Garden of Eden as the Inner Source of the Jewish Holidays**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable z”l and

Ambassador Yehuda Avner z”l

By Debbi and David Sable

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In memory of David Yehuda Ben Shaul z”l (Mr. David Goldstein)

whose *shloshim* fell this week

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**A River Goes Out of Eden -** **Introduction**

This series deals with the Jewish holidays and their relationship to the story of the first man, Adam. These *shiurim* are a selection from the more comprehensive book series of the same name, which I have been privileged to publish in Hebrew in recent years.

The Jewish holidays have many dimensions, and their wellsprings continue to flow in every generation with new illuminations that delight us with their vitality and holiness.

This series, which deals specifically with the holidays, is based on a broad and fundamental idea that applies to the entire Torah: namely, that the story of the Garden of Eden is the foundation of the Torah and that it contains the essential elements of the entire Torah. In today's terms, we can say that this story is "the genetic code of the Torah."

The manifest dimensions of the Jewish holidays are rooted in the chapters of the Torah dealing with the holidays in *Parashot Emor*, *Pinechas*, *Re'eh* and others. These holidays stem from the Exodus from Egypt; *Chazal* fix this principle in the text of the *Kiddush* and the prayers that are recited on all the holidays: "a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt." In this series of *shiurim,* we will try to uncover the deeper roots of the holidays, which are found in the story of the Garden of Eden, in which is concealed the inner meaning of the entire Torah.

Even before we examine the story in depth, it is clearly apparent that despite its brevity, it touches upon all of the basic elements of life: God and man, body and soul, mitzva and sin, good and evil, communion and passion, trust and guile, idea and rupture, life and death, pleasure and toil, solitude and family, exile and redemption, and many other elements. Upon deeper examination, we find that not only does this story contain these elements, but it also sheds new light upon them.

**The Garden of Eden and *Tikkun***

The story of the Garden of Eden sets before us the perfect image of human existence in the face of its divine origin, and it also teaches us about the great crisis of the beginning of humanity: the sin of the first human beings, Adam and Chava. This same crisis, however, gives rise to the entire idea of repair (*tikkun*) and to Israel's role in its realization, as stated by *Chazal*:

For when the serpent came upon Chava he injected a lust into her: [as for] the Israelites who stood at Mount Sinai, their lustfulness departed. (*Shabbat* 146a)

This principle has been discussed by various scholars across the generations. The Ramchal elaborates on the principle and writes:

In the wake of Adam's sin, the world suffered a great fall, as we have explained. Shortcoming was added to shortcoming in earthly reality. Therefore, what is necessary now is that we correct the added shortcomings first. This will continue to be done until the time of the redemption, because this is the ultimate purpose of exile, to repair what was spoiled, and to retrieve what was lost, in order to attain afterwards the good that will follow, as should have been attained by Adam had he not sinned. (*Da'at* *Tevunot* 158)

The Master, blessed be He, hung the repair and elevation of all of Creation on the actions of Israel. (*Derekh Hashem* 2, 4, 9)

The Ramchal's words illuminate the history of Israel in a precious light. They explain that the history of the Jewish people — in their rise and in their fall, in their independence and in their exile — is not limited to the history of a particular people, but rather it constitutes the backbone of the general history of the world — a historical process that once again restores the world to its original destiny. The destiny of all of creation depends upon this process that the Jewish people undergo, the purpose of which is to bring the world to perfection by way of the idea of repair given to Israel. The people of Israel build not only their own destiny, but also the future of the entire world. In this way, the people of Israel become God's partner in the creation of the world. The Ramchal adds that the process will not end merely with the repair of the world's defects and shortcomings; rather it will end with the good that humanity was originally meant to attain: "as should have been attained by Adam had he not sinned."

**Learning from Adam**

We are like the dust under Adam's feet. "The ball of Adam's heel outshone the sun, how much more so the beauty of his face" (*Vayikra Rabba* 20, 2). Our understanding cannot comprehend his stature, the depth of the test that he faced, and his deed (see the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 38b, and the commentaries of Rabbeinu Chananel and Rama, ad loc.).

However, the story of Adam is part of the Torah, and therefore we must study it, as our rabbis did across the generations. In the book series *A River Flows from Eden* and in the series of *shiurim* before you, we come not to cast reproach upon Adam and Chava, but merely to examine what the Torah tells us about their sin, in order to better understand the Torah and to learn from it about our purpose and role.

***Mitzvot* and Refinement**

The worlds fell with the fall of the will, man fell into the abyss of sin, his will became reduced and foul… O, how the heart yearns to repair the great sin… We are called to this endless task. We march on along the paths of life, according to the plan of the King of the Universe, to shine light upon everything. (Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook, *Orot Ha-kodesh* III, p. 81)

If the overall purpose of the Torah is to lead man and the world from the place to which he descended to a repaired world, then not only the events that befell Israel, as they are described in the Torah, lead us on that path, but each and every *mitzva* in the Torah certainly has a part in the repair of the sin. Thus, indeed, we find in the words of the sages of Israel, as, for example, the *Or Ha-chayim* writes:

For all the *mitzvot* that God gave Israel were meant only to refine and clean the base things that surrounded the primal sin. (*Or Ha-chayim*, *Vayikra* 12:3)

According to this, the spiritual roots of all the *mitzvot* lie in the Garden of Eden. Every person is meant to take part in the journey back to the Garden of Eden, with the help of the *mitzvot* that surround every facet of our lives and contain within them a spiritual component directed to do so.

Among the totality of the *mitzvot* in the Torah, this series of *shiurim* will focus on the holidays and the *mitzvot* associatedwith them. Adam's sin adversely affects the connection between him and God. He is banished from the garden, the *Shekhina* departs and returns to heaven, and the gaping distance becomes the permanent basis of the new situation.

Countering this remoteness, the holidays are times for renewed meetings and encounters with God. They are rooted in the renewed encounter between God and the people of Israel in the formative events at the beginning of our history, and they continue in our return to this encounter every year. The holidays are a repair of the connection that has been severed. The people of Israel hallow the holidays and renew their encounter with God on each holiday with its own unique perspective. Each holiday is a renewed encounter with God's presence, through the repair of one aspect of Adam's sin that led to the disconnection.

The Arizalteaches us that the holiday season of Pesach, counting the *Omer* and Shavuot and the holiday season of Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot deal with the repair of different aspects of Adam's sin (see *Sha'ar Ha-kavanot*, Pesach, Essay 1, and Rosh Hashana, Essay 1).

In fact, there are earlier sources of this idea, and they are also part of the manifest, non-Kabbalistic side of the Torah. Many allusions found in the verses and statements scattered in the words of *Chazal* shed light on this entire conceptual circle that is rooted in the Torah, according to which the roots of the Jewish holidays are found already at the beginning of time in the story of the Garden of Eden. Pieces of these conceptual processes are scattered in the words of the early authorities. In this series of *shiurim*, these pieces will be joined together to form a comprehensive and elaborate picture.

In the course of our study, we will try to expand our perspective to all aspects of the Torah, based on the recognition that the plain sense of the verses, the Midrashic expositions, and the esoteric teachings are all interconnected and shed light one on the other. We will see how paying precise attention to the verses and recognizing the depths of *Chazal's* concise remarks and the inspiration of the esoteric sources and of the sources of the Jewish sagesthat draw upon them — all of these allow us to reveal new depths in the Torah.

To this end, we will make use of *aggadot* and *halakhot* relating to the holidays, knowing that they draw upon each other in some hidden way. We set before our eyes the words of Rav Kook:

The truth is that every *aggada* has a halakhic essence, and similarly every *halakha* has inner aggadic content. (*Orot ha-Kodesh* I, p. 26)

**Identifying the Tree of Knowledge**

One of the channels through which the connection between the Jewish holidays and the story of Adam becomes clear is the question of the identity of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

We find in the words of *Chazal* four main identifications of the tree: wheat, grapevine, fig tree and *etrog* tree (see *Berakhot* 40a; *Bereishit Rabba* 15, 7). The various identifications should not be understood as being in disagreement about the facts, but rather as reflecting diverse spiritual dimensions of the tree. This is already noted in *Tikkunei Ha-Zohar*:

And for this reason the Sages of the Mishna said that tree from which Adam partook was wheat, and others say it was a grapevine, and yet others say it was a fig tree. They do not disagree, for it is all true. (*Tikkunim Mi-Zohar Chadash*, 107a)

As stated, this series of *shiurim* is based on the recognition that the various Jewish holidays are rooted in the story of the Garden of Eden. Among other things, this is reflected in the correspondence between these holidays and the different identifications of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The identification of that tree with wheat illuminates the holiday of Pesach, the period of the counting of the *Omer*, and the holiday of Shavuot. In the framework of the *shiurim* on the holiday of Sukkot, we will examine the connection between Adam's sin and the *etrog*. The *shiurim* dealing with Purim are based on the connection between Adam's sin and the grapevine. Similarly, in the *shiurim* dedicated to Chanuka, we will consider the connection between Adam's sin and the fig tree.

**Rosh Hashana: Day of Creation, Sin and Pardon**

We will open our series of *shiurim* with the holidays celebrated in the month of Tishrei: Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot. The connection between Rosh Hashana (which also marks the day of creation) and the story of creation with which the Torah begins is, in this respect, the most striking connection. Less well-known is the fact that *Chazal* associate Rosh Hashana not only with the creation, but also with Adam's sin. *Chazal* emphasize that Rosh Hashana is the day on which Adam is judged for his sin and pardoned. They see this as a sign for his descendants, the people of Israel, that they too will be pardoned on this day every year:

In the eighth hour, [God] brought him into the garden; in the ninth hour, [Adam] was commanded; in the tenth hour, he transgressed; in the eleventh hour, he was judged; in the twelfth hour, he was pardoned.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Adam: This is a sign for your descendants. Just as you stood before Me for judgment on this day and you were pardoned, so your descendants will in the future stand before Me for judgment on this day and they will be pardoned. When? "In the seventh month, on the first of the month." (*Vayikra Rabba* 29, 1)

These words of *Chazal* raise certain questions: What is Adam's sin? In what sense is Adam pardoned, and why does this have ramifications for the people of Israel? In light of this, we must clarify what we are judged for on Rosh Hashana and why we are pardoned. What is the meaning of the *mitzva* associated with the day of Rosh Hashana, blowing the shofar; and how does it help us achieve a pardon?

As we will see in our study, Rosh Hashana is the day on which man is judged for severing his relationship with God, a detachment that manifests itself in all the transgressions committed over the course of the year. The *mitzva* of blowing the shofar is the instrument designed to renew this connection. We will see that the unique elements of the *Musaf* prayer that is recited on Rosh Hashana — the *Malkhuyot, Zikhronot* and *Shofarot* blessings — all deal with different components of this connection and repair Adam's sin.

**Adam and Yom Kippur**

When it comes to Yom Kippur, unlike Rosh Hashana, at first glance there is no clear connection between it and the story of creation or the story of Adam and his sin. The sacrificial service performed on Yom Kippur is recorded in the Book of *Vayikra*, and it centers on sacrifices that achieve atonement for the sins of Israel. In this connection, Yom Kippur is included in the general system of sacrifices with which the Book of *Vayikra* deals, one of whose most prominent roles is to atone for sins.

There are, however, many indications that Yom Kippur is a unique phenomenon that is markedly different from the world of sacrifices and atonement of the rest of the Book of *Vayikra*. The scope of the atonement it provides, which includes not only the inadvertent sinner but also the deliberate sinner and the criminally negligent sinner; the nature of the atonement which is described in the verses using terms of purity; and the special and exceptional manner in which the atonement is achieved by way of the High Priest who once a year enters the Holy of Holies in his white garments with the blood of a goat, while at the same time sending an identical goat to Azazel to be totally destroyed outside the Temple and outside the area of human settlement — all these characteristics go well beyond what is familiar to us in the world of sacrifices. They require broader spiritual foundations than those found in the world of sacrifices in order to explain them.

In the *shiurim* dealing with Yom Kippur, we will see that the Yom Kippur service in its unique form is derived from the effect that Adam's sin has upon us and from our goal and mission to repair that sin. Yom Kippur's goal is stated in the verse: "For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins shall you be clean before the Lord" (*Vayikra* 16:30).

This verse raises certain questions, the most striking of which relates to the confusion between two separate systems that are constructed in the book of *Vayikra*: the system of sin and atonement and the system of impurity and purity.

Throughout the Torah, immersion in water is the way to achieve purity and sacrificial offering is the path to atonement, whereas in the verse before us, the atonement is what purifies. This connection between atonement for sin and purification from impurity encompasses the profound meaning of Yom Kippur. This meaning will be deciphered in light of the story of Adam, in which we encounter the first sin, which also brings the impurity of death into the world. Afterward, the polar separation between the two goats will be clarified against the backdrop of the tree in which good and evil are mixed together and require separation. The afflictions imposed upon the people of Israel will be explained as paralleling the service involving the goats, as they build the correct relationship between the "dust from the ground" and the "breath of life," the two elements out of which Adam is created.

Whereas the Rosh Hashana service deals primarily with the connection between Israel and God, the Yom Kippur service deals fundamentally with the return of each member of Israel to a pure original identity, a return that automatically separates the people of Israel from their sins.

**Adam and Sukkot**

The festival of Sukkot in its manifest strata is connected to the period of the Exodus from Egypt and also to the life of the Jewish people as an agricultural nation. Its basic level come to remind the people of their life in the wilderness in God's shadow following the Exodus from Egypt. Its second level reflects the people's joy and gratitude for the crops they succeed in growing in their fields in the Land of Israel. Despite the differences between these two levels, they have a common element that bestows a unique character upon Sukkot as a "festival of nature."

When we consider the totality of the holiday's commandments, we see that, beneath the surface, they are all deeply connected to the element of water, concerning which we are also judged during the festival, according to the Mishna. Water, which is the source of man's life, is one of the elements that deeply distinguish between Adam's situation in the Garden of Eden before the sin and the situation of the people of Israel who live in this world after Adam has sinned and has been expelled from the garden.

Water flows in the Garden of Eden in endless abundance and sustains unlimited life. In contrast, the people of Israel live in a world that has insufficient water, and therefore they depend on rain coming down from heaven. In truth, even the people of Israel live part of the year — the spring and the summer — not on the rains of heaven. During the festival of Sukkot, there is a transition from the spring and summer period, during which there is no rain and man depends on the water on the ground, to the fall and winter period, during which man receives water from the rains of heaven.

The water that flows through the *mitzvot* associated with the festival of Sukkot is found also in the heart of the Garden of Eden, and it opens a gate for us to understand the *mitzvot* of Sukkot. In the *shiurim* dealing with the *mitzvot of* *sukka* and the four species, we will see how the story of the Garden of Eden, the water found within it and the expulsion from it, explains the various elements of the festival of Sukkot and sheds new light upon them.

**Genesis of This Series**

These *shiurim* would not have come into being without the Torah merged within me from various different *batei midrash*, nor without my many years of Torah study in Yeshivat Yerucham, where this series first took form.

I thank God for having brought me through the gates of various *batei midrash*, for having allowed me to acquaint myself with Torah luminaries of previous generations and of our generation, and for having granted me the opportunity to study and to teach. I also thank all those Torah sages from whose mouths or writings I have had the privilege to learn.

Many points that I heard or read over the years, from scholars and from students, from articles and from books, have been incorporated into my own ideas to form the conceptual backbone of this series.

**From Yeshivat Yerucham and Yeshivat Har Etzion**

This series began with *shiurim* that were delivered over the course of several years in Yeshivat Yerucham. The full fruits of this series of *shiurim* have been published in a series of books, *A River Flows from Eden*. A selection of articles is presented here in English translation by way of the Virtual Beit Midrash of Yeshivat Har Etzion, the yeshiva in which I was privileged to study until I became a partner in the establishment of Yeshivat Yerucham, where I teach today.

**A Prayer for the Future**

It is my dream that these *shiurim* will offer the reader a deep and flavorful taste of the Jewish holidays, serving as a guide for an encounter with the Divine Presence that touches our real lives through those holidays.

May we merit that the prophecy of Yeshayahu be wholly fulfilled in us: "For the Lord has comforted Zion; He has comforted all her waste places, and has made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody" (*Yeshayahu* 51:3).

(Translated by David Strauss)